

THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER
15 November 1975

Mr. Ford asserts himself

By HARRIET VAN HORNE

NEW YORK CITY — This year the vogue in self-help is called "assertiveness training." There are dozens of books in the stalls instructing lambs how to roar like lions and showing the sheep how easy it is to zip into wolf's clothing and howl.

Somebody has been slipping these books to President Ford, wrapping them innocuously, one would guess, in the Sunday sports pages.

Mr. Ford believes that the public likes and will vote for a President who is strong, decisive, "gutsy" even if they disapprove his stand on public issues, writes Godfrey Sperling in the Christian Science Monitor.

"He Seeks Decisive Image" says The Wall Street Journal headline, "But Acts May Backfire."

Indeed they might. But the excitement generated by the recent high-level firings obscures for the moment any honest debate on the wisdom of Mr. Ford's moves.

What's to be gained by depositing the secretary of defense and the director of the CIA and taking one hat away from the secretary of state? Instead of a dialectic on the significance of Mr. Ford's "Halloween massacre" — Is George Bush necessarily an improvement over William Colby? — the question being asked is "How will these firings affect Ronald Reagan's campaign?"

The withdrawal of Vice President Nelson Rockefeller may or may not have been prompted by the President's new assertiveness. But if Gerald Ford is hoping to move to the right of Reagan, he will discover there's room there for none but cranks, kooks, and old Lar Daly in his Uncle Sam suit.

The point missed by the assertiveness-training books is the point Mr. Ford, too, may be missing. Assertion, of itself, is of no consequence without character, talent and a certain grace of spirit.

The President may cause a stir when he sweeps several men from his chess board.

But if his judgment proves wrong — if Donald Rumsfeld makes a botch of his job at Defense — what is the profit in this new boldness? If a President has to go about deliberately lopping heads and instantly naming replacements who are "my guys," simply to "look more presidential" then let God prosper the Democrats in '76.

If Mr. Ford wishes to remain in our future, let him apply his new assertiveness to the economy. Let him boldly retire Arthur Burns, secretary of the Treasury, William Simon and his other economics guru, Alan Greenspan.

Let him put his priorities in logical, human order and provide a million jobs. Let him discover that he is President of a poor and troubled nation, not of the National Assn. of Manufacturers.

With New York facing default and many other cities likely to follow suit, the President cannot continue to waffle on about fiscal responsibility, ignoring the disasters lurking in our sick economy. If President Ford would take the bold steps that might equalize the tax burden and put the unemployed back to work, he'd hardly need to worry about Ronald Reagan. Or any Democratic candidate, either.